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Implementing effective vocabulary building activities for enhancing communication in English in 11th grade students at Reino de Suecia Institute during the first semester 2019

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary enrichment is important when learning or acquiring a new language. However, this issue, is not seen as a need by some educators most of the time. This problem has entailed incapability in students. The present research paper aimed providing some updated activities for teaching vocabulary with the intention of enhancing communication in students of secondary school in Nicaragua. Five vocabulary building activities were implemented in 32 pupils of 11th grade from Reino de Suecia institute.

The observation and the application of interviews eased us the outcomes obtainment. These instruments allowed us to see and confirm the effectiveness of the chosen activities. We were able to identify the activities that were seen and

proved as less effective enhancing communication. Activities like the ones set out in this research can make a change in the vocabulary teaching-learning process in Nicaragua. They have contributed positively in learners as strategies to remember words more easily and they have been useful in practicing English in a communicative way.

Keywords: vocabulary, activity, communication enhancement, oral practice, knowledge expiation.

1- INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary teaching is usually seen as irrelevant in a language. Educators spend too much time teaching other skills and sub skills, and tend to forget how important knowing enough words in a language is. The lack of vocabulary is one of the main problems that students in secondary school face

The chosen activities have a communicative focus, and good outcomes were obtained through their application. We could get pupils' participation in class. Besides, one of the main objectives in this research was to make pupils feel eager to learn new words, and at the same time, to provide educators with some activities they can use as a way of easing the vocabulary teaching and a way of facilitating students the vocabulary learning.

2- FRAMEWORK.

2.1- What is vocabulary?

There are a bunch of definitions about what vocabulary means. The first idea that probably springs to mind is "words", but for anyone interested in exploring the subtlety and magic of lexis, the term "word" is too general to encapsulate the various forms vocabulary takes. Schmitt (2000, pag 1)

Vocabulary is usually understood as a set of familiar words within a person's language. But for Ferreira (2007) vocabulary requires not only words meanings

knowledge, but it requires the usage of the words in the appropriated context in a natural way.

Vocabulary is essential in text comprehension as oral as in written, knowing vocabulary means dominate words like nouns, verbs, adjective, phrasal verbs and even expressions. Loureiro (2007)

2.2- Productive or active vocabulary

Ramakrishna (2015) stated that productive or active vocabulary is learned intensively with respect to form, meaning and usage in such a way that the learner is able to use it in listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is also called as 'production' vocabulary. This kind of vocabulary is the one that some teachers find more likeable to teach. Due to it is supposed to be learned first by students and is the one they will feel more familiar with.

2.3- Receptive or passive vocabulary.

Receptive or passive vocabulary is found through reading and listening. Loureiro (2007) explains that it is a kind of vocabulary which could be taught secondly. For that reason, it is not common to find it as productive vocabulary.

Receptive vocabulary is also called passive vocabulary. It means all the words recognized and understood but not necessarily used by a person. We seldom use these words in our own speech or writing, but in a passive sense we are able to recognize them, when we hear or see them. The amount of passive vocabulary of a person is very high, as compared to the active vocabulary and it exist in the unconscious mind of the speaker. Ramakrishna (2015).

2.4- Vocabulary teaching for EFL students

2.4.1- The cognitive processes behind vocabulary learning

Thornbury (2002) discusses how the word knowledge is organized. The way words are stored in the mind resembles less a dictionary than a kind or network or web. The mind seems to store words neither randomly nor in the form of a list, but in a

highly organized and interconnected fashion- in what is often called the mental lexicon.

Our mental lexicon is highly organized and efficient. One way in which researchers investigate how the mental lexicon is organized is by comparing the speed in which people are able to recall items. It is generally accepted that if certain types of prompts can be answered more quickly than others, then this will reflect the lexical system.

2.4.2- Thoughts provided by new words.

This chapter has as a purpose to immerge readers into a psycholinguistics process, in which words power will be debated. How a wide vocabulary can change the way we think and the way we perceive our world. Ideas are blossom of our mind, turned into words.

Reed (2010) states how thoughts are changed by learning new words. Arguing that words create new worlds, delineate characters, evoke emotions and encourage response. Students feel empowered to use the words they have learnt, and the reason of this feeling is because they have struggled to understand them. Students' brain works to execute this process.

Our thoughts are modified and expressed better in speeches and writings as our vocabulary grows.

2.5- Traditional vs new approaches for vocabulary learning.

The teaching process in its complexity is based on a series of methods and techniques, meant to bring about improvement, evolution and recognition of language richness. All these methods make up a conglomerate whose elements oscillate between traditional and modern. Depending of the classroom needs and level of cognition, the methods are more or less valuable, but are sure to correspond to the society requirements during a certain historical era. Ionic (2014, Pag 404).

2.5.1- Some of the traditional activities. Memorizing.

- Looking for unknown words in the dictionary.
- Repetitions. (Saying the word several times, writing the same word in different sentences.
- Schemas.
- Writing shorts paragraphs.

2.5.2- Some new activities for learning vocabulary.

A great number of new ideas and techniques will definitely contribute to the effectiveness of learning, and motivate students in their continuous attempt to acquire a foreign language at desirable standards. Ionic (2014, p 404).

- The word soup.
- The crazy story.
- The dialogues.
- The intruder word.
- The stopwatch dictionary.
- What can you relate with?

2.6- The role of vocabulary for effective communication.

2.6.1- Expanding vocabulary knowledge by learning new words and being able to dive in different contexts.

New words allow us to dive in different contexts in a language. If we want students to be able to communicate in diverse language fields, teachers should teach them varied vocabulary. Thereby, they will feel encouraged to move further of simplicity.

As well stated by Blachowicz and Fisher (2005) words both express, and allow speakers to extend, their understanding of the world around them and to access to completely new world.

Xhaferi (2008) maintain that in order to develop students' communicative competence language. Teacher should encourage them to learn as many words as possible. Also in her research mention that, no matter if students will not be often exposed to a particular field of a determined language. But is always important to have hints about specific context.

3- RESEARCH DESIGN.

This research has a qualitative approach. Results were obtained through observations. Jackson, Drummond and Camara (2007) state that qualitative research is first concerned with understanding human beings' experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach. The function is to investigate answers to questions about the evolution of an experience or phenomenon via observation. The observation and interviews were used as techniques of data collections in this research.

The population is represented by 195 students of 11th grade attending Reino de Suecia institute in the evening shift. As a sample, we have taken the whole students of 11th grade C, which consists of 32 students. However, only 10 of them were requested to answer our interview. It should be noted that these students were the ones who participated the most, and were with us in every class. Also, it is important to mention that the students' English teacher participated willingly in an interview too.

4- RESULTS AND ANALYSIS.

Vocabulary building activities implemented.

The following activities were included in the applied lesson plans. All of them were chosen with the objective of easing vocabulary teaching, and with the purpose of enhancing communication in learners. It should be highlighted that some of the implemented activities are known as traditional, but all of them were set out in a revamped way.

Activities applied:

1. The word soup.
2. The dialogue.
3. The intruder word.
4. The crazy story.
5. What can you relate with?

These five activities were chosen to make pupils practice the given vocabulary orally, and as a way of remembering easier. In some of them, students had to get the meaning by context. While, in other activities the word meaning was provided to the pupils. Also, these activities allowed learners to use not only the presented vocabulary, but the vocabulary they already knew. All of the used activities were implemented in different days, but following the same unit and giving continuity to a single topic. "Professions", using the future tense.

Observation results.

Through the observation, we could evidence the students' reactions to the activities that were applied, and find out which activities made students participate the most, which one allowed them to use English in a more communicate way, and the one which evidenced that learners have remembered more words. Also, the activities with the lowest participation and the lowest outcomes obtained.

We found out that the activity that made them practice English in a more talkative way, was the activity named "what can you relate with?". The activity consisted on giving some piece of papers to the students. Learners, have them moving around and asking questions from pieces of paper to several classmates in the class. To illustrate this, here are two examples:

- a) What profession can you relate with houses? / I relate it with builders.*
- b) What profession can you relate with photos? / I relate it with models and photographers.*

In this activity students were evidenced asking and answering the given questions to different classmates. It proved that they learnt and consequently, remembered most of the words set out by us.

On the other hand, the activity which got the lowest student participation and consequently, practice less English in a communicate way. Was "crazy story". In

this one, students were not likely to pass in front of the class to share their story. Some of them felt unable, even having the complete exercise. This activity can be a good option for beginners, because it allows them to write before talking, so they can make sure what are they intending to express. However, satisfying results were not obtained through its application.

Interview results.

With the interview, we confirmed that the activity which they liked the most was "what can you relate with?" Students expressed that this activity allowed them to practice English in an integrated and of course, conversational setting. Also the dialogue was another activity they enjoyed practicing.

The dialogue seems to be a traditional activity. However, it still works very well with learners, enhancing communication, mainly if it allows them to express what they want. Usually, when a dialogue is given to the students, they memorize a script, and then tell it. But if in the dialogue student are allowed to erase parts and to add ideas they want to say, they look it good, and better reactions are got from the activity.

The answers of the students and the teacher obtained through the interviews have confirmed that applying activities like the ones they were part of, especially the ones which were found as more effective, learners can be able to use English better in a communicative way for future years. Also, that applying activities, in which the meaning is getting by context are difficult, but allow them to think and relate words in order to get the meaning.

The chosen activities were evidenced impacting the students' communication. Once, they were implemented, we noted pupils conveying some sentences using the given vocabulary. The strategies integrated learners working in pairs, individual and with the whole class.

5. CONCLUSIONS.

Some activities presented in this investigation process, got good responses from the students. In the application of the vocabulary building activities "what can you relate with? The dialogue, and the intruder word. Learners had the opportunity to practice English orally through their implementation. Besides, we could evidence that those activities were the ones which worked the best with the students. On the other hand, we confirmed that the vocabulary building activities. "the crazy story and the word soup" were the ones which seemed as less effective. Also, it was proved that some traditional activities like the dialogue still work very well in students, they just need to be adapted making them more communicative according to the objective that is pretended to reach.

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